

VZCZCXRO5238  
PP RUEHBC RUEHDA RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK  
DE RUEHGB #1074/01 0981446  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 071446Z APR 08  
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6712  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001074

SIPDIS

SBU  
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: IESC MEETING APRIL 4

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki chaired the Iraq Executive Steering Committee (IESC) in support of Operation Fardh al-Qanoon (FAQ) April 4. Discussion focused on the provision of essential services and humanitarian aid to areas affected by the recent violence and featured a lengthy interchange between Ministry of Health officials and Baghdad Operations Commander General Abud on the need for better coordination to permit the secure but timely travel of ambulances through checkpoints manned by Iraqi Security Forces and Coalition units. Several of the assembled GOI officials expressed concern about the way the recent crisis was being portrayed in the media, and suggested that the GOI must put more effort into its public relations campaign. The Prime Minister said that many news outlets are highlighting the humanitarian suffering in areas where ISF forces are fighting, without paying due attention to the root cause of that violence -- the actions of outlaw militia groups. The enemies of the GOI are warping the public's perception of the conflict and creating sympathy for the wrong parties, he said. Recently released from five days of captivity at the hands of militia kidnappers, Fardh al-Qanoon Spokesman Tahseen Sheikhly pledged to redouble his efforts to get the Government's message out to the people. End summary.

-----  
Maintaining services requires coordination with ISF  
-----

¶2. (SBU) Prime Minister Maliki welcomed the packed house of attendees and declared that the meeting would address the critical services and humanitarian needs of Baghdad's neighborhoods. National Security Adviser (NSA) Rubaie outlined the meeting's major agenda topics of health, electricity and food supply.

¶3. (SBU) The Ministry of Health was represented by a contingent of officials that included the Health Minister and the Directors General (DGs) for the western and eastern (Karkh and Rusafa) halves of Baghdad. The Minister stated that despite the overall unpreparedness of his ministry to cope with such an emergency, he felt proud to be an Iraqi as he witnessed the hard work performed by his doctors, nurses and other workers and as Baghdad received support and supplies from neighboring provinces. He specifically cited Salah ad Din and Ninewa as provinces providing aid to hospitals coping with patients injured during the fighting in Baghdad and Basra.

¶4. (SBU) Each DG provided an overview of the health-related concerns in his sector, describing numbers of patients admitted, operations performed, and deaths recorded. Each DG highlighted examples of problems faced when ambulances, health supply trucks, and even when they themselves personally tried to get through checkpoints manned by ISF or Coalition units. A lengthy discussion on this topic between these DGs, General Abud and the other GOI participants ensued. PM Maliki stressed that effective coordination between the ministries and the BOC be maintained so that

ministry vehicles were not prevented from restoring services or delivering supplies.

15. (SBU) Mayor of Baghdad City Saber al-Essawi chimed in that he expected all Amanat vehicles to be inspected vigorously at ISF checkpoints, and asked for no special favors for municipal workers. He stated that the Amanat has been 'infiltrated' and militia groups have access to many municipal vehicles that could be used to transport arms, munitions, supplies and personnel for nefarious purposes. He launched into a spirited criticism of the outlaw militia groups currently wreaking havoc in Baghdad and urged the Prime Minister to maintain the toughest possible line on these criminals. Iraq is at a crossroads, he said, and these militias must be eliminated or the government will surely fall. The Minister of Health, possibly inferring from the Mayor's comments the suggestion that Sadrist-affiliated ministry officials within his organization were just looking for an easy way to bypass checkpoints, took a moment to announce his certainty that his ministry had not/not been 'infiltrated' in such a manner.

-----  
Food and electricity supply affected, but not critically  
-----

15. (SBU) The Minister of Electricity reported that work to maintain the flow of power across Baghdad continues apace; the recent crisis has made that work more difficult, but the overall electricity supply to Baghdad has not been dramatically affected. Sniper attacks against his workers in Sadr City and other hot neighborhoods are preventing repairs.

BAGHDAD 00001074 002 OF 002

16. (SBU) The Deputy Minister of Trade reported that the distribution of food supplies to citizens in needy areas is hindered by security problems in Basra, where ships at the Um Qasr port still need to be unloaded, and in Sadr City, where trucks have been prevented from picking up supplies at several warehouses. Humanitarian assistance provided by other international organizations, such as the Red Cross and Red Crescent, was noted.

-----  
Issues for future meetings identified  
-----

17. (SBU) Former Deputy Prime Minister Ahmed Chalabi reported on the activities of his Services Committee, stating that he and several other GOI officials paid visits to services facilities in Sadr City and elsewhere in Baghdad over the past week. He emphasized the importance of such visits and urged his fellow GOI officials to do more to engage the local citizens of Baghdad during this time of crisis.

18. (SBU) Chalabi raised the issue of Baghdad's potable water supply, stating that the GOI must determine how they were going to ensure an adequate supply throughout the summer. The topic has been addressed by his Services Committee a number of times, but needs to be raised in the IESC forum, he said. Mayor Saber agreed that the issue was serious and said that approximately 55% of Baghdad's potable water supply is lost due to illegal siphoning.

19. (SBU) Provincial Council Chairman Mueen al-Khademy stressed employment as a critical issue for the IESC to look into. He said that one of the root causes of the current conflict was unemployment, as young men often turn to militia groups when they do not have a steady job to keep them occupied.

-----  
Losing the public relations war?

-----  
¶10. (SBU) Prime Minister Maliki expressed displeasure at media outlets, referring to several satellite channels, which seem to be serving as mouthpieces for the criminals at war with the government. Stories airing the grievances of these gangs and showing the hardships imposed on Iraq's citizens by the recent fighting seem to be laying the blame on the GOI and not where it rightly should rest -- upon the outlaws who are sabotaging national infrastructure and causing the shortages in food, electricity and other services. PM Maliki likened the current media situation to the way Saddam was able to convince the Iraqi people to blame the UN and the Western nations for the hardships of the Oil-For-Food program when, in fact, he was the one truly responsible.

¶11. (SBU) Fardh al-Qanoon Spokesman Tahseen Sheikhly commented that a great deal of media attention has been paid to the plight of citizens in Sadr City, but he wanted to offer the following anecdote about his recent kidnapping: During his nearly 5 days of being held by militia gunmen at locations in and around in Sadr City, he noted that the electricity remained on for all but two hours and he observed his captors drinking a regular supply of tap water with no ill effects or complaints.  
BUTENIS